



How Continental Premium Corporation was founded

By: Debbie Bertram

Continental Premium was founded in 1967 by Bob Stelle. After his first job with Pure Oil (remember that name?) he realized he had no desire to work for anyone and struck out on his own doing accounting for individual Pure Oil stations. He created a loyalty program with truck drivers, charging them one dollar and then sending them a key chain and a membership card that entitled them to get discounts at Pure Oil truck stops. As kids, we thought it was cool to open the envelopes from the truck drivers and send off the keychain and card.

Bob then thought it would be a great idea to entice customers into gas stations by having a continuity program if you purchased a full tank of gas. Plastic teal cups were one of the first offerings, followed by umbrellas. In 1967 he started Continental Premium because he realized it was better to get commission from vendors as opposed to using his own money for the promotions.

And so it began-----

One of the national companies represented in those early days, manufactured stickers and tattoos, which were a big hit with General Mills and Frito Lay. Those were the days of laundry detergent inserts, cereal box promotions, coffee can offers - the beginning of loyalty programs. McDonalds started their happy meals and Continental Premium was instrumental in finding those first packs.

Casio, AT&T, Kodak, IBM, Bissell, Faribo Blankets, Brother Typewriters, Stiffel Lamps and a host of other companies came into this marketplace quickly.

Continental Premium partnered with Hinda Incentives, Certif-a-Gift, Selective Gift Industries, MarSan, Motivation Excellence and had programs with Diner's Club, Marriott Rewards, World Book, Discover Card, Jewel, Illinois Bell, Chicago Sun Times and Keebler. Those were the days my friends-----

At one point in the 70's we were 7 separate companies under the Continental Premium umbrella and business was booming. Two failed partnerships and an AT&T program gone bad cut that number down to one. Bob was always the innovator and strove to organize the industry through service in the Incentive Manufacturer Representative Association. His ethics and leadership have always been respected.

Debbie entered into the business in 1987 after a 14 year nursing career and initially set out to enter the company data into a new computer program that helped streamline processes. She got a break with Keebler Company and provided many custom dealer loaders until Keebler was swallowed up by Kellogg's.

Bob demoted himself to Executive Vice President and Debbie became the President in 2004. Bob continued to write multitudes of letters to companies introducing Continental Premium and citing the wisdom of using incentive merchandise. He made a daily list of what he wanted to accomplish. A dry sense of humor and a love of adventure kept him positive. We miss him.

So we are here after surviving the recession - it's a team effort - many people throughout the years have contributed - Lore, Debra and Paula support the business now internally - they are the best. And we definitely wouldn't be here without our customers, suppliers, friends and family. Many thanks for the support and may we continue to prosper.